

4 March 2008: Standardized Testing Day

We handed out supplies for the test today saying, "Happy Birthday!" and "Happy Holidays!" There was an air of sarcastic cheer as the students received their materials. We then went over reminders for the exam---skip and return, ask questions before we begin.

I think that to fully understand the Earth School experience, I need some time in other classrooms. I wonder if this is how it is for other teachers, too. Do they wonder what goes on in other classrooms? Certainly teachers discuss how students behave in their individual classrooms, but I wonder how each student is engaged differently in different subjects with different teaching styles. I may not be the best teacher for some of my students!

Today was a bit insane. I don't know if it had to do with testing, the weather, or if it was just destined to be a crazy day. Maya was frazzled, having to yell at kids who are generally calm and collected. What happened? I tried to run a club and it was a disaster. I had kids whom I like, admire, and connect with. From the get-go, I forgot to establish ground rules about out-of-the-classroom activities. The kids asked if we could go downstairs, and I agreed. They wanted to go into the gym. I said we could be there only if it wasn't occupied. Three kids ran down in front of me. I went into the gym and discovered I lost two kids. Not good. The gym was noisy- another group was there and a cloth divider had been drawn between two sections of the gym. It was not a space conducive to good theatre. We went to move into a smaller space when one of my kids came from the OTHER side of the gym with two balls in his hand! I immediately asked for the balls and tried to start an activity with the kids. I told them that if we needed supplies, I would bring it myself or send one of them to get it. The kids should not be getting supplies without being asked to do so. I told them we would be doing drama, not playing with balls, and though, in the future, we might do activities with balls, today we weren't going to. I asked them not to touch the balls until it was time to put them away. We then began playing a dramatic game. Each of us had to say our name and do a dance move, then the whole group got to repeat it. It was going fairly well when a teacher came down the stairs. She was trying to be ultra-nice, but I wish she would've gotten to the point! She kept talking and talking and I could see from the corner of my eye that the kids were getting restless. She was telling me that as a student teacher, I needed to be in the hallway where other teachers could see me. I totally understand! It's a school policy---please tell me straight up!!! I was going to take the kids upstairs, when I turned to a rollicking game of throw-the-ball-as-hard-as-you-can-against-the-wall. One of my kids ended up getting hurt. I dismissed the kids to their classrooms and sent one to a nurse. I was not going to continue with four kids---and I had told them about the balls. They were testing my limits, and I was firm.

I felt bad having to end the activity, but the kids needed to learn that I stuck to my word. Also, a strange thing happened. A kid (the original ball collector) who feels no remorse for anything suddenly felt bad about drama being cancelled. He moped around the classroom and actually apologized for his actions. Whenever he pushes another kid, messes up their work, or disturbs others physically or verbally, he laughs off consequences. Often, the only consequence he feels is some time on the "take a break" chair. Today he felt the consequences of his actions. I wonder if there is a way to get through to him when he bothers his classmates?

On a happier note, I made two deals with kids today. One was with Lucas. Apparently the struggling ELL watches the Discovery Channel every night. I asked him to tell me what he learns in his writing journal, since I don't have a television. The other deal was with Eric. All he does is play video games or watch cartoons at home. The result? An altered view of reality and pretend...they kind of mix together for him. I asked him to write to me about the games he plays. What challenges you? What is easy? What is the most fun? What level are you on? Hopefully he will improve his critical thinking and writing skills with this exercise.